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The Shoreline

Tom Swets

Grand Valley State University

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THE SHORELINE

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.

I.
He has crossed the beach and it burned.
He has left the sand's surface pockmarked
With hastily placed footprints.

From the shore he gazes to the beach
And sees children knee-deep in sand.
He has crossed the beach and it burned.

Cool sand caresses the half-buried children
While gothic castles drips from their fingers.
He has left the sand's surface pockmarked.

The man stands facing the darkening sea
Whose surface he knows will not be marked
With hastily placed footprints.

The fading vestiges of a day's light
Warn him that he nears his night.
He has crossed the beach and it burned.

II.
Fish in the waves wash dead upon shore.
Harried beetles scurry over the footprints
Of the man who on shore heard mermaids.

Fishermen return from the devil-fish sea
With no fish but a net full of algae.
Fish in the waves wash dead upon shore.

Children run to the fishermen's hands
And leave their castles to cross the sands.
Harried beetles scurry over the footprints.

Water laps coldly on the gnarled legs
And fish floating dead abrade the feet
Of the man who on shore heard mermaids.

Beetles stand solemn like black-frosted clergy
As if they knew of the grave in algae
Of the man who on shore heard mermaids.

TOM SWETS